STATE OF UTAH GENERAL OUTLOOK
January 1, 2009

SUMMARY

Water year 2009 is thus-far eerily similar to water year 2008. Both years began with a few early season October storms that put some snow in the high country. Subsequently, both years turned dry in November and the first half of December with large storms pounding the state in the latter half of December. One cannot easily forget the snow shoveling between Christmas and New Years of 2008 or the repeat in 2009. In mid December this year, snowpacks were hovering in the 30% to 50% range with many of the lower elevation stations without any snow at all. Recent large storms have brought southern Utah snowpacks ranging between 110% and 160% of average. With southern snowpacks at these levels, flashbacks of water year 2005 come to mind where new record high snows and flooding occurred. While there is always a chance we could have a repeat of 2005, the probability is extremely low and our capability to identify and deal with such events has increased. Northern Utah is now near 90% of average and central Utah from Richfield to Spanish Fork have increased snowpacks (75%) but not nearly as much as both north or south. Fall precipitation was much below normal in both October and November (50% to 80%) and consequently, soil moisture figures are lower than last year, especially in southern Utah. Current soil moisture saturation levels in runoff producing areas are: Bear – 53%, Weber – 50%, Provo – 39%, Uintah Basin – 31%, SE Utah – 29%, Sevier – 35% and SW Utah – 28%. Dryer soils typically mean less runoff from snowmelt. Reservoir storage is currently at 57% of capacity statewide compared to 62% last year. General water supply conditions are near average in northern Utah, above average on the Virgin and near to below average in central Utah. Streamflow forecasts range from 60% for the Bear River at Stewart Dam to 114% of average on Coal Creek near Cedar City. Surface Water Supply Indices range from 12% on the Bear River to 71% for the Virgin. The extremely low value for the Bear River is a reflection of Bear Lake storage which continues to be well below normal.

SNOWPACK

January first snowpacks as measured by the NRCS SNOTEL system are as follows: Bear - 88%, Weber - 91%, Provo - 90%, Uintahs - 79%, southeast Utah - 86%, Sevier - 110%, southwest Utah - 157% and the statewide figure is 93% of average. There is a substantial part of snow accumulation yet to come this year and any outcome is possible depending on future climatic conditions. If drought prevails, snowpacks could range between 20% and 60% of average. Given maximum accumulations, April 1 snowpacks could range between 140% and 250% of average. With normal accumulations, April 1 snowpacks will be between 90% and 120% of average. The areas with lowest snowpack averages are the north slope of the Uintahs – 63% and the San Pitch Basin at 75% of average.

PRECIPITATION

Mountain precipitation during December was above to much above average across the entire state (143%), ranging from 118% on the Bear River to 246% of average over SW Utah. This brings the seasonal accumulation (Oct-Dec) to 101% of average statewide and ranges from 89% over the Uintah Basin to 140% in SW Utah

RESERVOIRS

Storage in 41 of Utah's key irrigation reservoirs is at 57% of capacity down 5% compared to January of last year year. A very mild and dry fall has contributed to reservoir declines across the State. There is some good news on the reservoir repair front as the Enterprise reservoirs,

Deer Creek and Scofield are now are now able to store unrestricted. Willard Bay remains restricted.

STREAMFLOW

Snowmelt streamflows are expected to have a wide range from much below average to above average across the state of Utah this year. Forecast streamflows range from 60% on the Bear River at Stewart Dam to 114% on Coal Creek near Cedar City. Most flows are forecast to be in the 80% to 105% range.